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Teaching Performative Verbs and Nouns in EU Maritime Regulations

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with performative speech acts in European Union fisheries legislation with a view to relating the semantic analysis of directive and expressive speech act verbs to politeness strategies for the management of positive and negative face. The performative verbs used in directive and expressive speech acts belong to the semantic domain of communication verbs. The directive verbs occurring in the material are: *appeal, authorize, call upon, conclude, invite, promise, request, urge* and *warn* while the expressive verbs are: *congratulate, express (gratitude), pay (tribute)* and *thank*. The semantic analysis of directive verbs draws on Leech's framework for illocutionary verbs analysis (Leech 1983: 218). The analysis suggests that the choice of directive and expressive speech act verbs and their co-occurrence with particular addressees are motivated by the socio-pragmatic situation. 30 Naval Engineering students from the UPM also learned how these speech act verbs are used in context in the subject *English for Professional and Academic Communication* (2011-2012).

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Introduction. EU fisheries legislation and aims of this study

EU summaries of legislation are documents used by the European Union for stating their decisions concerning the formation of future behavior with regard to the internal administration of Fisheries and the ordering of relations between the different European countries. These summaries of legislation are typically explicit performatives (Hughes 1984: 379) and commonly express directive and expressive speech acts and declarations. As declarations "can scarcely be said to involve politeness" (Leech 1983:106), they are therefore outside the scope of the present study*. Politeness in this EU institutional discourse is associated with the use of intentional indirectness and

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ambivalence achieved by the choice of speech act verb and of the linguistic form for performing the intended speech acts.

The theoretical framework for the study of performatives remains multidisciplinary in nature: it draws on Pragmatics (Leech, 1983; Trosborg 1995, Ng and Bradac 1993) and on a sociolinguistic approach (Blommaert 1999). EU discourse is comprised of sets of various discursive practices which constitute the society and culture of Fisheries, a specific field of action, as well as being constituted by them (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Performatives, help to constitute and shape the “frame” of Fisheries discourse.

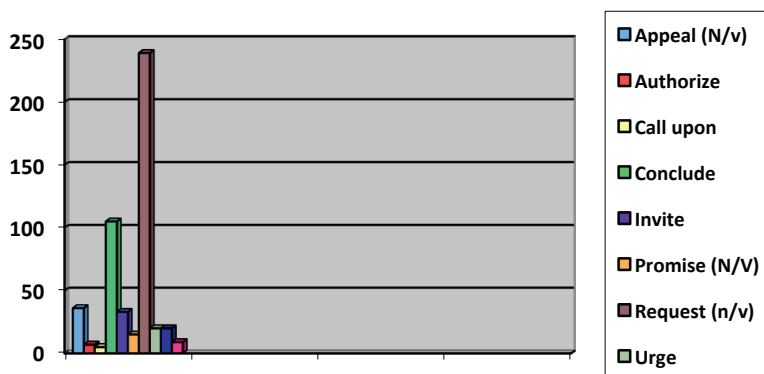
The examples of EU Fisheries legislation described below have been established by means of extensive EU web-archive search (http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/maritime_affairs_and_fisheries/index_en.htm) using this web as corpus. The summaries of legislation corpus formed ad-hoc allowed identifying the scope of speech act verbs with the aim to discover its main qualitative features.

The organization of this paper is as follows: First, attention will be paid to directive speech acts and secondly, to expressive. Lastly, some concluding remarks will emerge and the implications of teaching these pragmatic formulas for students will be briefly sketched.

2. Directives in EU Fisheries

Generally speaking, directive verbs are clearly addressee-oriented and they state duties and obligations for the EU Fisheries stakeholders. The EU desires certain state of affairs to come true and uses different degrees of imposition to achieve its goals. Writers do not use direct performatives and prefer indirect performatives instead for solving problems (Searle 1975:344-350). According to Leech (1983: 36-40), the use of this intentional indirectness reflects politeness considerations.

Graph 1 shows the results for directive verbs and nouns. The profuse use of *request* outnumbering by far the rest of directives reflects that writers show a clear preference to convey a middle imposition and the addressor (the EU) desires that the addressees do the intended propositions.



Graph 1. Use of Directives. Raw tokens.

The semantic analysis of these verbs and nouns indicates different nuances of meaning. The verb *appeal* in the sense of ‘request earnestly (something from somebody); ask for aid or protection’ suggests a stronger commitment than a wish and indicates a weak imposition on the EU’s part (examples 1 and 2). The same applies for *call upon* (examples 3 and 4)

The verb *authorize* in its first sense ‘grant authorization or clearance for’ gives permission to do X in virtue of the EU’s authority in example 5:

These performative utterances can be regarded as ‘transformative’ performatives, which create an instant change of political or environmental status, or ‘promisory’ performatives, which describe the world as it might be in the future.

(5) The invited scientists are expected to bring with them the equivalent 2012 data sets by GFCM-GSA concerned and that, according to each national scientific coordination system, **are authorized** to use them. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/studies/data/documents/bulgaria-annex-9-2012-dcf-data-call-landings-discards-length-age_en.pdf)

Authorize in its second sense ‘give or delegate power or authority to’ reveals a plain difference in status among members. See example (6) which clearly signals the Member States as more powerful participants than the scientists:

(6) In addition we invite Member States to **authorize** the scientists to make use of all the necessary data as collected in research projects funded at national level only.

Conclude in its two senses ‘decide by reasoning; draw or come to a conclusion’ and ‘bring to a close’ indicate a strong commitment on the EU’s part, as in examples (7) and (8) :

(7) I am forced to **conclude** that Europe must have two Common Fisheries Policies today. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/docs/neil_fergusson01_en.pdf).

(8) (...) the results of the negotiations which have taken almost one year **to conclude**. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/news_and_events/press_releases/2012/20120206/index_en.htm)

Invite does not involve any imposition (example 9):

(9) The objectives of ecological, economic and social sustainability can best be addressed by managers through using stakeholder forums to **invite** industry, science and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) ...to define them and give clear guidance on how to use them. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/docs/north_east_scotland_fisheries_dev_en.pdf)

It is to be noted that none of these verbs imply strong imposition, which is in keeping with the polite relationship among the participants, which demands formality.

Request is by far the most significant verb and noun in the summaries of legislation. One possible explanation for its frequent use is that requests are ways of asking for other people’s help to get something done (Pérez 2001:115-130). The prototypical requests found in the EU fisheries website are based on the presupposition that the addressee is capable of performing an action that would help the speaker out of a problem. See example 10.

(10) Local action groups may **request** the payment of an advance from the competent paying agency if such possibility is provided for in the operational programme (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/com_2011_804_en.pdf)

Urge is used for a strong imposition when it means ‘force or impel in an indicated direction’ (example 11):

(11) I read with keen interest the article on page 2 of the UK newspaper, "The Times" entitled, "Water Out of Fish". I am particularly concerned by the very real and imminent threat to European fish and **strongly urge** and demand that the EU Commission adopt the proposed ITQ Guarantee system favoured by Alaska, NZ, Norway and Iceland immediately to avoid otherwise delayed action being too late (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/docs/philip_james_en.pdf)

The addressor, Philip James, contributes to the EU MARE CFP CONSULTATION as a citizen and desires that the addressee adopts the ITQ system. It is a strong imposition reinforced by both the use of the emphatic adverb *strongly*, found in formal English in written documents and the use of the verb *demand*, whose meaning is ‘request urgently and forcefully’.

However, *urge* conveys a middle imposition when it means ‘recommend, push for something’:

(12) We **urge** the Commission to consider how best Community science funds can be utilised to more accurately reflect the economic importance of shellfish (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/docs/shellfish_association_of_great_britain_en.pdf).

The addressor –The Shellfish Association of Great Britain- wants the addressee to spend more EU Community science funds for shellfish.

As regards the use of the verb *promise*, according to Searle's speech act theory (1979), promises commit us to some future course of action that will involve a certain benefit to an addressee or to a third party. The most significant feature of the uses of *promise* in the corpus seems to be the overall preference for using declarative sentences as in example 13:

(13) So we have asked the scientific community to bridge any data gaps for as many stocks as possible by the end of 2012 – my ultimate goal being the long-term, science-based approach for all stocks and for mixed fisheries that I **promised** when I took office. (ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/publications/halfway-there_en.pdf)

Maria Damanaki, the European Commissioner for Fisheries, uses the verb *promise* in its core sense, 'making a commitment. Joe Borg, a former Commissioner, also uses the verb *promise* in *The Green Paper on Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy* in a related sense 'promise to undertake or give': to ensure that the future European fisheries policy is based on a huge consensus among the EU fisheries stakeholders (example 14).

(14) To get people involved we have posed open questions, but everybody is free to explore new ideas – I **promise** a broad-based, no-holds-barred debate which should leave no stone unturned. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/magazine/mag44_en.pdf)

Finally, it is also interesting to note the overuse of the adjective *promising* in the sense of 'give grounds for expectations' found in 75 examples. The use of a performative verb, noun or adjective makes explicit the promise meaning of a declarative construction. These different types of performative realizations are capable of instantiating promises and thereby producing highly codified instances of this speech act type (example 15):

(15) .. will also cover the international scene as they debate the most **promising** solutions to the manpower crisis (http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/maritime-day-2008_en.html)

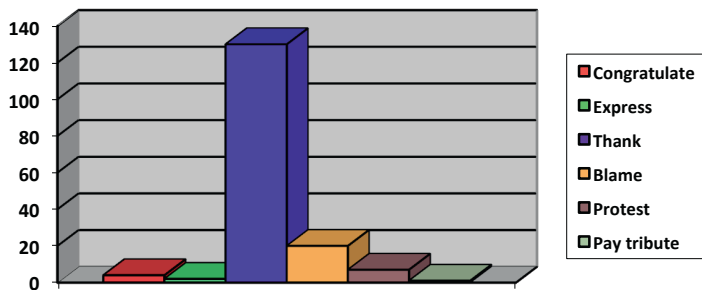
Warn may be used for a middle imposition when used in the first sense of 'notify of danger, potential harm, or risk' as in example (16) where Nigel Cooper, Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, advises that the EU should protect the coral reefs as suggested by Scientists:

(16) Under a business-as-usual scenario, scientists **warn** that we may witness the disappearance of coral reefs by mid-century. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/docs/nigel_cooper_en.pdf)

3. Expressives in EU Fisheries

Expressives are defined as aimed at communicating the speaker's emotional state about the situations presented in the content of a message (Wierzbicka, 1985). Positive politeness is found in these speech acts and is motivated by the desire to maximize the praise of the addressee (Leech 1983). The first and foremost speech act is thanking and its paraphrases (*express gratitude*) as shown in Graph 2. Thanking is considered a polite form of behaviour and clearly addressee-oriented. The EU's gratitude is conveyed through the acknowledgement that others (MPs of the European Parliament) have done something good for the Commissioner, Joe Borg and that he feels pleased about it. Example 17:

(17) ...to become involved in efforts to eliminate discards, and to **express my gratitude** to the Members of the European Parliament for their support. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/news_and_events/events/workshop_270508/borg_en.pdf)



Graph 2. Expressive Speech Acts. Raw tokens

The second group consists of verbs with a negative prosody *blame* and *protest* (Wei 2012). Contrary to the findings of other studies (Leech 1983), the users of these verbs do not comply with the approbation maxim, which requires ‘minimizing dispraise of *other*’. It is important to note that the users of these verbs are citizens contributing to the consultation of different reforms as in example 18 and feel less obliged to be polite than EU Fisheries senior officials:

(18) Fishing communities in Canada were compensated for the loss of their livelihood. Something similar could be done in Europe. Several EU countries will **protest**, namely Portugal, France and Spain, but we have reached the cross-roads - we either manage the fish stocks or we eventually do untold damages to future generations

The very formal phrase *pay tribute to* is used only three times in the data in a praise of those who contribute to the development of fisheries policy, the act performed having an institutionalized character:

(19) During its discussions and negotiations on the CFP reform the EU should **pay tribute to** this and act in a precautionary manner. (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/docs/pro_wildlife_en.pdf)

To recap, expressive speech acts address primarily fisheries stakeholders. The expressive verb used with the highest frequency is the neutral *thank* and the formal phrase *expresses one’s gratitude*, which addresses other members of the European Parliament (Example 17). The formal phrase *pay tribute* is used in institutional acts. Instances of negative politeness have also been found in the citizens’ contributions to EU Fisheries policy.

4. Concluding remarks and implications of teaching performatives to Naval English students

EU Fisheries Institutional Discourse uses both positive and negative politeness strategies. The latter are expressed by the use of indirect directive speech acts with a speech act verb mitigating the illocutionary force of the utterance and allowing for some ambivalence in its interpretation or verbs with a negative prosody (see example 18 above), while positive politeness markers are the first group in expressive speech acts and are confined to the choice of speech act verbs marked for high degree of formality, such as the frequent use of the verb *request* in directives.

Variation in the choice of directive speech act verbs may be ascribed to strategic choices in discourse for expressing a communicative intention and to the external factors of the institutional situation, in particular the power relations between participants. Given the specificity of the EU Fisheries Discourse, it is necessary to stress that these strategic choices available are restricted to a limited set of options for EU officials. Students were keen on learning this formal register.

The treatment of these and most speech acts in technical English textbooks is, for the most part, pragmatically inadequate. Students are very only occasionally given models (either in audio recordings or more commonly, as printed dialogues or examples) of the speech acts with very little contextual information or explicit metapragmatic discussion.

As regards requests, students discussed briefly in groups about certain characteristics of a speech act, i.e. requests, that make them difficult producing it in oral or written English. They were asked to provide a personal assessment of the most influential contextual factors in their production of requests. The constraints they found in order of importance were: transfer from L1, perception of target language norms, level of proficiency. After this, the class has followed Rose's procedure (1999) to learn English requests, namely:

- 4.1. Introduce speech acts in a way that stimulates the learners' interest and awareness using "field note" examples, in this case, using EU Fisheries.
- 4.2. Inform the learners about one aspect of pragmatics (e.g., requests).
- 4.3. Have learners collect data in their first language and conduct a pragmatic analysis of the data.
- 4.4. Conduct an analysis of similar pragmatic aspects (e.g., requests) in Spanish.

Rose's procedure was also used for expressives. Students are also consciously aware that English speakers typically use expressives for a variety of reasons such as:

- To express praise of others (Leech 1983:132)
- To express apologies or when they deplore, detest, regret something.

Overall, 98% of the students (40 students of *English for Professional and Academic Communication*, a compulsory subject with a B2 level) were happy to learn these speech acts and also demanded to know more about other speech acts such as complaining, complimenting or refusing politely.

There are two pedagogical implications that can be drawn from this study. First, engineering students may have a more difficult time in producing complex speech forms than teachers believe. Second, some learners may not be adequately aware of what is involved in complex speech behavior. These learners have benefited from a discussion of what speech acts and politeness are so that they can better understand the politeness strategies available that they use and be more systematic in their use of such strategies.

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